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THE PEOPLE VERSUS THE PEOPLE

by Bertrand de Jouvenel

Significant events have taken place in France recently. Enraged chiefly by the dearth of bread, but also by the general inadequacy of supplies, the population has, in several towns, invaded the seat of authority, the prefecture or under-prefecture, demanding bread, breaking furniture, making bonfires of files used for the control of distribution. Such was the temper of the crowd that the prefect of the Nievre was held by the Government to deserve the Legion of Honor for standing up to the rioters; while the prefect at Lyon let himself be marched off to the radio station where he had to announce on the air that he rescinded a former decision relating to bread.

Certainly one should not draw an over-colored picture of such incidents, unattended by any serious violence. But the historian cannot fail to liken them to similar events closely preceding the fall of the monarchy at the end of the Eighteenth Century. Let me remind American readers that the government of France is strongly centralized, with local government mainly exercised by an administrator known as the prefect, to whom the under-prefects in each department are responsible. The prefecture, or under-prefecture, is thus the local seat of central authority, to an extent for which American government has no parallel.

Just prior to the French Revolution, as now, "affameurs!" (starvers) was the popular cry. Then, as now, the representative of the central government (the intendant, father to the prefect of today) was taken to task by the crowd. Then, as now, the "papers" were burnt, as a symbol of liberation from distant administrative rule.

If not the King, the King's government was held responsible. It was rumored that there was "a conspiracy to starve the people," a potent psychological factor in the ensuing Revolution. Now practically the same mutterings can be heard: "They want to starve us!"

II

While the psychologist recognizes the perennial nature of crowd reactions, the constitutional lawyer holds up his hands in horror and dismay. What has been happening is to him the height of absurdity.

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How can the people suspect a government which is no longer the King's government, but actually that of the people! How can they treat the prefect, their servant, as they did the intendant, who was the King's servant! How can they revolt against rulings which are not imposed by arbitrary power but made by their own chosen representatives!

Not only is there no conspiracy against the people but the very measures the people revolt against were adopted for their benefit, at their request, with their approval: They are the embodiment of a conspiracy in favor of the people!

The dearth of bread cannot be denied. But it follows from measures which the people demanded; they wanted bread to be cheap. It was kept cheap; the price of wheat was kept down. Incidentally the peasants thought it wise, under those conditions, to grow other crops.

Take the clogging regulation of distribution. It was adopted to ensure that, regardless of buying power, each family should get its equal share of foodstuffs and essential goods. Repeatedly the people have stated that they want this regulation preserved. They refused votes to those requesting a return to the free market. They insisted that controlled prices be kept low, even too low to reward the producer.

They saw goods vanishing from the controlled market; shifting to the black market. But the cure they demanded was repression, and they cheered when "free traders" were threatened with the death penalty.

Yet the papers they now burn are the very papers which this policy of planned economy requires. Let us then state it frankly: it is a revolt of the people against the people's decisions.

III

To those who like to deal in abstractions, nothing can be more unpalatable than this statement of the facts. That the people's decisions and the people's representatives should be resented by the people as a tyranny, that the sovereign should revolt against the sovereign, is an utterly unacceptable fact. With relief one seizes upon a way out: the will of the sovereign has changed.

But there is no such escape. It is not true that the will of the electorate has changed. Very probably an immediate plebiscite would reaffirm the adherence of the electorate to the protested measures.

This situation should not be puzzling to the American student of government. Is it not a fact that the people in the States decided for prohibition, that individually they broke their own law, that this violation was so widespread that it may well be termed general; and that nevertheless, for a long term of years, the people did not go back on the decision they daily flouted?

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The present attitude of the French people offers a close similarity with that experience. Two themes of conversation succeed each other in the average modest home. The wickedness of the black market is denounced; it is held responsible for the prevailing shortages; tales are told of scandalous fortunes, of scandalous complicities in governing circles. Then one passes on to exchange of black market addresses; occasionally one will deplore the closing of a source of illegal supply, possibly by the very police action one has strenuously demanded. But such interventions are rare; the black market gets "protection."

Condemnation of the black market and resort to the black market are equally universal. The consumer who buys in the illegal free market refuses, as citizen, to legalize the free market. When he is thinking politically, he learns nothing from his own daily behavior.

Thus it is not strange that he should, as man in the street, revolt against the very powers which he votes for, as elector. It all goes back to the fundamental fact that the man who buys in the black market and the man who condemns the black market, the man who demands stringent measures of government and the man who revolts against administrative rule, while they are united in one body, are yet two men.

The member of the sovereign people who pronounces on what should be done learns nothing from his own day-to-day experience as subject of his own laws. When he acts as ruler, his whole disposition of mind is different from his humor as subject. The two qualities pertain to him but are not united and reconciled within him.

Surely there is nothing here to surprise the psychologist. It is a general trait of man to formulate, in the abstract, general laws to which his own conduct gives the lie. The best treatise on the duties to one's children was written by Rousseau, who abandoned his own offspring. Nor should this trait be noted in a spirit of irony and skepticism. When we state what should be done, we legislate for ideal men. When we act, we act as real men; as sinners. It does not disqualify our dreams, except as practical politics.

Much is being said about educating the people for democracy. What is actually done is the proliferation of primers "simplifying" the monetary problem, the "problem of Europe," or something as complicated.

IV

I submit, with all due respect, that this is fallacious education, that sketchy and rash generalizations are substituted for facts. Not only is the knowledge provided inadequate, but it is misleading: the reader gets the impression that social problems are simple and suscep-

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tible of simple medication. Nobody believes anatomy can be taught from a doodle drawing of a man with four sticks representing limbs. Yet getting a political education from primers is substantially that.

Primers take as their theme the widest possible subjects. Because they are wide, they have to be treated in sweeping terms: all the details are disregarded; all the living truth is left out. Such so-called education leads the people to hold strong opinions on matters that they have not grasped. Ignorance becomes complacent.

The further away one gets from the individual, the more one deals in millions, the more free one is from the complexities of life and nature, the more contentedly and freely one can move in an unresisting world of pure inadequate notions.

Our great moralist Alain holds that the process of thought, unchecked by continuous contact with reality and a daily effort to get positive results, creates a dream-world. Verbal mythology, he says, is the source of all madness; and labor against the concrete, the source of all true knowledge.

It follows that political education is not provided by the statement of wide issues in grossly over-simplified terms. Wisdom comes with the opportunity given to every member of the sovereign to put his opinions on how things should be done into practice, and by the ensuing adaptation of his opinions to reality. The answer to the problem is old: it is local self-government. So much self-government and so local that no one is debarred from being a magistrate; on such a minute scale that every one realizes his rulings are going to apply to himself.

If France is the home of abstract general ideas in politics, it is doubtless because there has been little self-government, and what there has been was lost long ago. If England on the other hand was long blessed with a remarkable sense of political reality, it was because there was much self-government. Germany has not always been politically mad: it went mad with the centralization of government.

A world government would of course be the ideal agent for the most sweeping measures, and the least adapted to actual living men. This is not said in criticism of the idea of world government, but as an overdue warning that representative government cannot endure unless John Doe the ruler begins to learn from Joe Doe the ruled.

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Bertrand de Jouvenel, who will contribute periodically to HUMAN EVENTS, is a distinguished French journalist who has specialized in the field of political philosophy.

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Not Merely Gossip *A Supplement to* Human Events VOL. IV, NO. 24

By Frank C. Hanighen June 11, 1947

Republicans have reason to rejoice over the results of the by-election on June 7 in the Third Congressional District of the state of Washington. Their candidate defeated his opponent, who received the backing of Henry Wallace, by a narrow but safe margin. The vote was about 25 per cent lighter than at last November's election and it is believed that at a general instead of a special election the Republican majority would have been much larger. The election was held on Saturday, a day when CIO workers are at liberty to go to the polls, but when farmers, especially at this time of year, stay home to work. The farmer vote in that area is regarded as Republican today. At any rate, any tide of criticism of the Republican record in Congress proved to be of insufficent strength in the District to reverse the Republican victory of last November.

Such news renders more acute an anxiety which the White House has felt for some time. The poll reveals a political pattern which, if it persists in 1948, spells serious trouble for the Democratic Party. The fact that Henry Wallace supported Charles R. Savage, the Democratic candidate (indeed spoke for him in the District), clearly threw many Democratic votes into the Republican column. Russel V. Mack, the Republican candidate, rolled up his biggest margin in one county where the Democratic leader refused to back Savage, saying that he was "opposed to the ideologies and political philosophies" for which Savage stood. In short, the voters repudiated Mr. Truman's gadfly Wallace, and in doing so elected a Republican.

The shadow of Wallace has lengthened. Dewey Fleming, head of the Washington bureau of the Baltimore Sun, in a survey (June 7) of the third party situation comes to the conclusion that Wallace would have little chance even of coming close to winning any electoral votes if he got on the Presidential ballot under a third party designation. But, he goes on, "The Wallaceites should be able to get on the ticket in a sizable number of states and if they were the right states they might tip the balance against Democrats to an extent that would insure Democratic Party defeat. For example, it is easy to imagine Mr. Wallace getting the Presidential nomination of the American Labor Party in New York and without the vote of that party the Democrats could not hope to carry the state in its present political complexion.

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Discussion as to whether Congress will pass legislation over President Truman's veto has largely neglected a factor which used to be important under Roosevelt and may prove so again. F.D.R. was not a man to shrink from saying to a refractory Democratic Senator: "Now you're just the type of man whom I would like to see in my Cabinet," or on the Federal bench, or in some other attractive appointive position. (Of course, there was other bait, such as promises to build a dam or a munitions plant in the Senator's state.) In this manner, some all too human rebels were effectively tamed and the outcome of close votes in Congress was decisively altered. In some cases, the late President justified the hopes raised in Senatorial breasts; in others, not. There are still bitter feelings in some quarters because the President changed his opinion of the "type of man," after the man had voted "right." But that is another story.

Until recently, Truman has not been noted for this practice. But in the past few weeks it has been reported that he has been talking seductively to some Senators whose votes, it is feared, would help to override a veto or pass a Republican measure. The President has a number of baubles to dangle before ambitious eyes. It is said by some that Justice Douglas will retire from the Supreme Court during the next year. Not a few would like to take his place. Mr. Gael Sullivan's inglorious career as Chairman of the National Democratic Committee is believed to be drawing to

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a close; there will be more than one candidate for his job. Then there will be the usual quota of life-term positions on the lower Federal bench. All such jobs will take on a particularly desirable aspect if it looks like a Democratic washout in 1948. Before a rout -- a scramble for security. Therefore, those who try to estimate whether or not there are sufficient votes to pass legislation over a veto should take into account the effect of cozy chats in the White House.

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Some sort of Balkan federation is believed to be a primary objective of the strenuous activity of the Russians in that area during the past week, according to State Department circles. Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland would be later added to this organization; and all these states -- after bolstering of Communist Party control -- would be laced into a network of economic and political pacts. The hand on the loom would, of course, be that of Russia.

Some irony is called for in comparing the gloomy State Department attitude towards this development today with its blithe state of mind in 1943. At that time, the Department's post-war planners were confidently outlining a prospective Balkan and eastern European federation of free democratic states. These Pollyanna planners were so certain of the outcome of their work that they scornfully dismissed suggestions that Moscow rather than Washington might be the architect and mortgagor of the proposed structure. Today, all that these planners have behind their cards to deal with such a Russian-dominated federation is one chip -- Greece. As a sardonic wit remarked: "We've got the Parthenon, Russia has all the rest."

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A storm is blowing up in the White House over the matter of the World Federation of Trade Unions, in which the Russian trade unions have the deciding voice and of which the CIO -- but not the AFL -- is a member. Recently, a roving WFTU delegation was involved in an ugly incident in Korea, in which the local Korean police cracked down on members of a Communist Korean trade union. The Daily Worker and other Leftist organs extensively aired the WFTU version of the affair. The WFTU has special rights in a consultative capacity in UNESCO and will have an office in the United Nations building in New York. Some Administration officials are raising the question of whether the WFTU as well as other Communist-dominated international groups should have a part in the political activities of the United Nations and should receive privileges which lead to their intervention in local political and trade union situations.

If the White House should back the attitude of these officials, it would have to reckon with the CIO. It is a little known fact that the CIO's membership in the WFTU proved to be an insurmountable obstacle in the recent attempt to bring about a merger with the AFL. At the April "fusion meeting" in Washington, Mr. Phil Murray stated that before the CIO unions would affiliate with the AFL the latter would have to give two guarantees: (1) that the CIO could continue to run its Political Action Committee (PAC); and (2) that it could remain a member of the WFTU. The AFL leaders refused to consider any such stipulation, and the attempt at a merger collapsed.

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When the State Department on June 10 officially gave its benediction to the India settlement -- which marked the end of Britain's 200-year old rule -- it naturally did not reveal its unofficial appraisal of the situation. Some very realistic thinking shaped its off-the-record attitude. In the first place, the terms of the pact in no way conflict with American interests. Next, State believes sincerely that these offer the best chance for successful operation of Indian inde-

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pendence, for the following reasons. By dividing the country into two (perhaps more) nations, the hope for a united India seems unattainable for some time to come. But this, it is believed, may work out as a temporary gain. A unified democratic India would admittedly be ideal. But the strength of communal feeling has become all too clear during the troubles of the past year, and it is evident that only an iron totalitarian dictatorship could weld the warring components into a genuinely united country. Such a totalitarian -- and quite probably belligerent -- state of nearly 400 million people would prove a new and disturbing factor in the world power situation. (But does State take the same view of China's unification?) Hence, partition offers the possibility of a much more pacific future in that part of the world.

The question has been raised: will not partitioned India prove fertile soil for Soviet infiltration and intrigue? It is replied that such may prove the case, but so would a "united democratic India" if the British and Hindus had forced the Moslem League into submitting to such a settlement. As it is, the Moslems in their separate state -- Pakistan -- are located in the strategic area in the North facing Russia, and are more likely to be under British than Russian influence. The plan for membership in the British Commonwealth of Nations is welcomed partly for this reason. Whatever Hindustan elects to do (and it may well stay out of the Commonwealth for the present), it is regarded as certain that Pakistan will enter what has been called the British League of Nations.

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As President Truman arrived in Canada, it was reported that the Dominion was asking the United States to raise the price of gold, a step which would provide our gold-producing neighbor with a larger supply of U. S. dollars. Canada has been worried about its supply of our dollars.

Le Canada, Montreal French language paper, in April pointed out that while Canada has become, since the war, a creditor Power, the position is by no means without "anxiety." "The total of our commercial operations with the United States in 1946 was represented by a debit balance of $500,000,000 and it is to be expected that to this deficit there will again be added some $800,000,000 two years from now. If such a state of things should go on without any corrective or compensation, our supplies of American currency would soon be exhausted."

This "anxious" position of a nation rated as one of the financially strongest in the world arises in large part because of the present state of its economic relations with the United Kingdom and the United States. Canada is doing a big export business with the former, although it is unsupported by a comparable volume of return trade. Also the Dominion is receiving large imports of goods from the United States, but is exporting much less to us. Formerly the free convertibility of currencies provided Canada with a means of squaring accounts with the United States and other countries: the favorable Canadian balance in London was helpful in meeting the deficit in New York. But today Britain is also seeking U. S. dollars. "Great Britain's embarrassment is creating in Canada," says Le Canada, "a problem whose solution is in Washington."

Whatever the outcome, the situation draws attention to two fundamental changes of historic importance to North America. In 1870, over half the imports of Canada came from the United Kingdom. Since then there has been a steady decline until today the British supply only about seven and a half per cent. At the same time, a contrary trend developed in United States-Canada trade. In the Confederation period (1864-67), the United States supplied only 30 per cent of Canada's imports. By 1946, the figure had risen to 75 per cent. As Deputy Minister Mackenzie remarked, "It is a classic example of the powerful role played by geography in determining the direction of trade, despite certain aspects of commercial policy."

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Notes and Quotes

Collier's on June 21 is scheduled to publish the first of a series of articles which should prove of great interest to students of the Roosevelt era as well as political fans. Mr. James A. Farley, Democratic Party boss under President Roosevelt from 1932 to 1940 has written his memoirs, which will appear in book form next January under the imprint of Whittlesey House. The portions dealing with the political campaigns of 1936, 1938 and 1940 will appear in the Collier's articles. Mr. Farley did not depend solely on his capacious memory in writing his book. The material is drawn from what is described as a "roomful of files." The former Postmaster General dictated voluminous notes after conferences with the President and other important figures and retained much of his official correspondence.

Those who have seen the manuscript say that it contains many revealing anecdotes. Thus, after Roosevelt's failure to purge various independent Democratic Members of Congress in 1938, Mr. Henry Wallace, now leader of the Left, was heard to say: "Roosevelt is going too far to the Left -- we must swing him back to the Right." Mr. Roosevelt discussing the trouble he was having with one of his critics suggested, "Let's have a look at his income tax reports." And Mrs. Roosevelt seeking to interpret her husband's character, once remarked: "Franklin has difficulty in talking with people who are not his social equal."

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One of the U. S. Navy's recruiting posters portrays a happy-looking young man in blue, with the caption: "His future is secure -- Is Yours?" The come-on has at least one disturbing implication. Years ago, the Navy posters used to promise courses -- in bookkeeping, boiler-making, etc. -- as preparation for the day when the recruits returned to civil pursuits. It was assumed that the ex-sailor, assisted by such education, would tackle life on his own.

Not so today, judging by the present ad. Its inference is obviously that a life career -- not a few years -- beckons and that it possesses none of the hazards to which civilians are subject. Adequate pay, housing, health (pace Mars), supervised play, supervised thinking and eventual retirement on a pension would take care of the sailor from puberty to the grave. Is this the kind of vista which attracts young men today? Quite a number, we would guess. The Navy advertising department probably came pretty close to judging correctly the post-war psychology of many an ex-service man. We cannot forget the guilty confession of a GI friend on leave that life in the service had one irresistable attraction: he was not bothered by any personal responsibility.

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Raymond Mortimer in the New Statesman and Nation (May 3) discusses the wit of Bernard Shaw: "Sixty-six years ago Mr. Shaw learnt from his fellow-Dubliner, Oscar Wilde, that a truism, when reversed, becomes a witticism; and in his tireless exploitation of this formula he has often achieved wisdom as well as wit. Some critics have attributed his paradoxes to a tropism: as a fish has to turn towards a light, Mr. Shaw, they declare, has to swim away from any generally held belief. The fact that it is generally held proves to him that it is untrue. . . . Perhaps the most surprising of his new sallies occurs in an account of Hitler:

> 'Encouraged by spineless attempts to appease him he attacked Russia, calculating that as a crusader against Soviet Communism he would finally be joined by the whole Capitalist West. But the Capitalist West was much too shortsighted and jealous to do anything so intelligent. It shook hands with Stalin and stabbed Hitler in the back.'

In this passage, all of it remarkable, the concluding metaphor is the jewel. Mr. Shaw selected it, no doubt, merely for its familiarity in a different context."

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